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UNHCR'S EVALUATION PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. UNHCR's evaluation function has been the subject of careful review by the Executive Committee, including its informal consultations held in November 2000, which focused on the need to further develop this function and to devolve evaluation activities to the organization's regional bureaux and field offices. A plan of action designed to realize those objectives was reviewed, and has been the basis of activities by the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) in 2001. These activities were subsequently discussed at the June 2001 meeting of the Standing Committee.

2. This paper first outlines some developments in terms of the management and direction of UNHCR's evaluation function. The second section focuses on the utilization of evaluation findings, while the final section provides an overview of EPAU's current and future work programme.

II. MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF UNHCR'S EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

A. Evaluation policy, procedures and plan of action

3. Following extensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, a UNHCR evaluation policy has been established. The policy, which takes effect from 1 January 2002, defines the role of evaluation in UNHCR and outlines the specific tasks to be undertaken by EPAU. It identifies the principles guiding UNHCR's evaluation activities, as well as the criteria to be used in the evaluation of UNHCR's programmes. Copies of the policy will be available at the October 2001 meeting of the Executive Committee.

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4. The policy includes a three-year development plan which:

- Commits UNHCR to minimum and steadily increasing levels of evaluation activity and expenditure;

- Places new responsibilities on UNHCR's regional bureaux and field offices to undertake and commission evaluations; and

- Introduces new approaches and procedures that are intended to ensure that the findings and recommendations of evaluations are effectively utlilized.

5. The policy will be supported by the introduction of step-by-step guide to the management of evaluation and self-evaluation projects, thereby ensuring that evaluations are conducted in a uniform and principled manner. An important task for EPAU in the months to come will be to ensure that these procedures are properly understood and implemented by regional bureaux, directorates and field offices as they assume new evaluation responsibilities.

B. Strengthening EPAU's capacity

6. One JPO post was established in EPAU in January 2001. In January 2002, an additional P4 post will be added to the unit.

7. With earmarked funding, EPAU has engaged an external evaluation specialist on a long-term consultancy contract. The consultant will lead the unit's efforts to equip other parts of the organization with the skills and tools required to assume responsibility for evaluation activities.

8. Continued efforts have been made to provide EPAU staff members with professional evaluation training. Two of the unit's staff members participated in a three-day evaluation training course organized by the University of York in the United Kingdom. The Head of EPAU also attended a week-long training workshop for senior evaluation managers, organized by the Action Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP).

C. Devolving the evaluation function

9. A number of steps have been taken in recent months to devolve the evaluation function within UNHCR and to strengthen links between EPAU and other parts of the organization. These include:

- Expanding the Evaluation Committee to include representatives of all the regional bureaux;

- Establishing an evaluation fund that can be accessed by regional bureaux, sub-regional directorates and field offices wishing to commission evaluations;

- Convening a second evaluation training workshop in Geneva in May 2001. More than 40 UNHCR staff members, as well as a government and an NGO representative, have now participated in these workshops;

- Establishing steering committees for all major new evaluation projects, enabling key stakeholders within UNHCR to be involved in the process of planning, implementation and utlilization;

- Developing a methodology for the organization of facilitated self-evaluation workshops, and field-testing that methodology in south-west Ethiopia;

- Organizing lessons-learned workshops on major UNHCR operations and policy issues, in association with the organization's regional bureaux and functional units. The latest initiative of this type was held in Monrovia and concerned the Liberian repatriation and reintegration programme; and

- Identifying all of those evaluations, reviews and assessments undertaken or commissioned by other parts of the organization. Recent examples include evaluations of the shuttle bus project in Kosovo (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), the UNHCR programme for internally displaced persons in Colombia, UNHCR's local settlement programme in Serbia (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), the UNHCR programme for urban refugees in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and the mobile court project in Dadaab, Kenya.

D. Diversified methodologies

10. UNHCR has continued to pursue a diversified approach to the evaluation function, involving the introduction of alternative and innovative methodologies. A number of these initiatives, including joint evaluations with other agencies, lessons-learned workshops and facilitated self-evaluations, are described elsewhere in this paper. In addition, EPAU commissioned a "beneficiary-based" evaluation of the UNHCR programme in Guinea, involving extensive consultations with refugees, and undertook "real-time" evaluations of UNHCR emergency operations in Angola, Eritrea and Sudan.

E. Inter-agency cooperation

11. Steps have been taken to strengthen UNHCR's cooperation with its partners in the area of evaluation. An inter-agency evaluation (OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP) has been commissioned to examine the United Nations' humanitarian programmes in Afghanistan. A joint Danida/UNHCR evaluation of the UNHCR programme for IDPs in Angola has been completed. UNHCR has also participated in WFP evaluations of refugee assistance programmes in Sudan and Uganda. EPAU continues to be an active member of ALNAP, as well as the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Evaluation.

F. Dissemination

12. Using earmarked funding, EPAU commissioned a communications expert to undertake a review of the unit's dissemination activities. As a result of that review, EPAU has introduced a new strategy of targeted hard-copy distribution, both within and outside the organization. The release of each

new evaluation report has been marked by the electronic distribution of an 'evaluation alert', providing a concise and lively synopsis of the report's findings and recommendations. Looking to the future, EPAU hopes to experiment with the presentation of evaluation findings in audio-visual formats.

III. MAKING EFFECTIVE USE OF EVALUATION

13. In UNHCR, as in many other humanitarian organizations, evaluation has traditionally focused on the preparation of a report that presents a set of findings and recommendations. While not discounting the value of such reports, UNHCR is now committed to the introduction of a project-based and utilization-focused approach to evaluation, maximizing the extent to which evaluations act as a catalyst for organizational analysis, learning and change. To achieve this objective, all major evaluation projects will guided by a stakeholder steering committee, while every effort will be made to incorporate workshops and other participatory activities in the design of evaluation projects.

14. The introduction of a new evaluation policy, incorporating a management response requirement, is also intended to ensure that UNHCR makes effective use of the evaluation function. According to the new policy, accountability for the implementation of evaluation recommendations belongs first and foremost to the operational managers concerned. EPAU will, for its part, encourage, facilitate and track the follow-up process. At the same time, renewed efforts will be made to feed evaluation findings into UNHCR's policy-making procedures, staff training activities and the preparation of management tools.

15. The action taken to make use of evaluation findings will inevitably differ from one case to another. The EPAU project on urban refugees, for example, will conclude with a stakeholder workshop and the preparation of a revised policy statement. The findings of the recent review of UNHCR's activities in Liberia are being fed into the planning process for the Sierra Leone reintegration programme, while lessons learned from the implementation of the security package in the United Republic of Tanzania have been used as a basis for planning the organization's operation in Guinea.

16. The findings of major thematic reviews on issues such as refugee children, refugee women and statelessness will be shared and discussed with the project steering committees, the Executive Committee and other stakeholders, so that appropriate follow-up plans can be established.

IV. EVALUATION WORK PROGRAMME

17. EPAU's current work programme is focused on several of the key policy issues currently confronting UNHCR.

A. Refugee children

18. EPAU has commissioned an independent evaluation of UNHCR's role in meeting the rights and protection needs of refugee children. Work on this project began early in 2001, and is expected to be completed by the end of the

year. The leader of the evaluation team will provide a briefing on the review at the October 2001 meeting of the Executive Committee.

B. Refugee women

19. EPAU has seconded a gender specialist staff member to a review of the implementation of the guidelines on refugee women, which is being undertaken by the Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Children, supported by members of the Executive Committee. The timeframe for this review, which is also benefiting from input by UNHCR's Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, is similar to that of the evaluation on refugee children.

20. In addition, EPAU has commissioned an in-depth evaluation of the firewood distribution project in Dadaab, Kenya, which is intended to address the problem of sexual and gender-based violence, and is also currently commissioning a review of the Kosovo Women's Initiative. At the conclusion of the latter project, it is hoped to produce a broader review of lessons learned from the Women's Initiatives in Bosnia, Kosovo and Rwanda.

C. Statelessness

21. A review of UNHCR's activities in relation to statelessness, undertaken jointly by an external consultant and an EPAU staff member, has recently been completed and published.

D. Refugee education

22. Working in close association with the Health and Community Development Service, in 2000 EPAU commissioned a number of studies on key aspects of refugee education. These studies, which are to be published as a collection, formed the basis of a workshop held in Washington D.C. in March 2001, attended by a wide range of experts, UNHCR, NGO and government personnel.

E. Protracted refugee situations

23. With earmarked funding, EPAU has established a project to review the way in which UNHCR and its partners manage protracted refugee situations. Working on the basis of several case studies and thematic reviews, the project will attempt to establish a menu of programming options that can be used to promote livelihoods and self-reliance amongst refugee populations, until such time as voluntary repatriation becomes possible. This project is being undertaken jointly with the Reintegration and Local Settlement Section and is also being closely coordinated with the Regional Bureau for Africa.

F. Protection and evaluation

24. EPAU, in association with the Department of International Protection, has held a series of preliminary meetings with evaluation staff members from the International Committee of the Red Cross, so as to discuss the challenge of ensuring that protection and human rights issues are properly incorporated in evaluations of humanitarian programmes. Further work on this issue is anticipated in the months to come.

G. Future evaluations

25. EPAU works on the basis of a flexible and rolling work programme, enabling the unit to respond to changing demands and circumstances and to mak use of innovative evaluation methodologies. The unit will in future undertak and commission evaluations of major policy and programme issues, as well as evaluations of specific operations, programmes and projects. The work programme will be established on the basis of a consultative process with stakeholders, including members of the Executive Committee.

26. At the time of writing, EPAU is planning to commission an independent evaluation of the community services function in UNHCR, and to establish a joint evaluation of the organization's programmes in Guinea and Sierra Leone. The unit is also assisting the Regional Bureau for Europe to review UNHCR's capacity-building efforts in Central Europe, and is supporting the Engineerin and Environmental Services Section in a review of environmental projects in Tanzania and Uganda.

27. Further details of UNHCR's evaluation work programme can be found on the Evaluation and Policy Analysis page of the UNHCR website, <www.unhcr.ch>. A list of recently completed reports is also provided in Annex I.

H. Policy development and research

28. In addition to its efforts in the area of evaluation and operational policy analysis, EPAU has continued to contribute to the broader process of policy development within UNHCR. During the period under review, the unit ha played an active role with regard to issues such as the role of humanitarian action in conflict prevention; the role of regional organizations in the process of peacebuilding; the link between humanitarian assistance and development aid; the changing nature of the refugee problem in Africa; the nexus between migration and asylum; and the security and civilian character o refugee camps.

29. EPAU is responsible for the publication of the working paper series, "New Issues in Refugee Research", which provides UNHCR with an opportunity to disseminate the results of independent and refugee-related research. While they are not evaluations in the traditional sense of the word, the papers present a critical perspective on the work of UNHCR and the international environment in which it operates. A list of recent papers is contained in Annex II.

Annex I

Evaluation reports, November 2000 - July 2001

Evaluation of UNHCR's policy on refugees in urban areas: a case study review of New Delhi (EPAU/2000/04)

Minimum standards and essential needs in a protracted refugee situation: a review of the UNHCR programme in Kakuma, Kenya (EPAU/2000/05)

Evaluation of UNHCR's role in strengthening national NGOs (EPAU/2001/01)

A beneficiary-based evaluation of UNHCR's programme in Guinea, West Africa (EPAU/2002/02)

The Sudan/Eritrea emergency, May-July 2000: an evaluation of UNHCR's response (EPAU/2001/03)

Evaluation of the UNHCR programme for internally displaced people in Angola (EPAU/2001/04)

Lessons learned from the implementation of the Tanzania security package (EPAU/2001/05)

The WHALE: Wisdom we have acquired from the Liberia Experience: report of a lessons-learned workshop (EPAU/2001/06)

Evaluation of UNHCR's policy on refugees in urban areas: a case study review of Cairo (EPAU/2001/07)

Evaluation of the Dadaab firewood project (EPAU/2001/08)

Evaluation of UNHCR's role and activities in relation to statelessness (EPAU/2001/09)

Forthcoming reports:

Evaluation of UNHCR's policy on refugees in urban areas: a case study review of Nairobi (EPAU/2001/10)

Lessons learned from UNHCR's experience with reintegration programmes in South-East Asia (EPAU/2001/11)

Research papers, "New Issues in Refugee Research"
November 2000 - July 2001

No. 33. UNHCR's mandate: the politics of being non-political
David Forsythe

No. 34. Environmental refugees: myth or reality?
Richard Black

No. 35. Refugee aid and protection in rural Africa: working in parallel or cross-purposes?
Oliver Bakewell

No. 36. Humanitarian issues in the Biafra conflict
Nathaniel H. Goetz

No. 37. Statistically correct asylum data: prospects and limitations
Bela Hovy

No. 38. Vital links in social security: Somali refugees in the Dadaab camps, Kenya
Cindy Horst

No. 39. The trafficking and smuggling of refugees: the end game in European asylum policy?
John Morrison and Beth Crosland

No. 40. The humanitarian hangover: transnationalization of governmental practice in Tanzania's refugee-populated areas
Loren B. Landau

No. 41. Global migration trends and asylum
Susan F. Martin

No. 42. Comfortable with chaos: working with UNHCR and the NGOs; reflections from the 1999 Kosovo refugee crisis
Tim Cross

No. 43. Mind the gap! UNHCR, humanitarian assistance and the development process
Jeff Crisp

No. 44. The interface between migration and asylum in Bosnia and Herzegovina
UNHCR Office of the Chief of Mission for Bosnia and Herzegovina